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U.S. Transportation Secretary LaHood Praises Delaware for Tough New Ban on Texting and Cell Phone Use

WASHINGTON -- U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood today lauded Delaware Governor Jack Markell for signing a tough new anti-distraction law that bans drivers in the state from using hand-held cell phones while driving and sets strict penalties for texting behind the wheel. Delaware is the 30th state to ban texting while driving.

“Electronic devices are potentially lethal in the hands of any driver,” said Secretary LaHood. “Thanks to Governor Markell, everyone who rides on Delaware’s roads will be safer due to enactment of this strong measure.”

The new law creates a comprehensive statewide restriction on handheld cell phone use. The measure also prohibits drivers from text messaging, sending or reading e-mails or browsing websites while a vehicle is in motion. Under the law, the first offense carries a penalty of \$50. A second offense carries a fine of \$100 to \$200. The law is primary, meaning police can stop drivers if they suspect a violation of this law alone.

According to the latest data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), nearly 6,000 people died in 2008 in distracted driving crashes nationwide. The highest proportion of those crashes involved teen drivers, and a total of 659 teens were killed in distracted driving-related crashes.

NHTSA has developed sample legislation that states can use to craft measures banning texting behind the wheel. The sample bill is patterned after President Obama’s October 1, 2009, Executive Order prohibiting federal employees from texting while operating government-owned vehicles and equipment. Last year, more than 200 distracted driving bills were under consideration by state legislatures, and the pace has increased markedly this year.

Recently, Secretary LaHood launched pilot programs in New York and Connecticut as part of a “Phone in One Hand. Ticket in the Other.” campaign to study whether increased enforcement and public awareness can reduce distracted driving behavior.

For more information on distracted driving and the Department of Transportation’s work, visit www.distraction.gov.

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